



Women in Black
London

**Women in Black London, C/o The Maypole Fund
PO Box 14072
London N16 5WB**

17 September, 2009

Dear Mr. Anders Fogh Rasmussen,

I am a member of the London branch of an international network called Women in Black against War. We hold regular weekly vigils in a central London location, opposing militarism and war. Recently we organized a day's workshop on contemporary conflicts. Several issues concerning the war in Afghanistan were highlighted in the discussion, raising questions to which we find it difficult to respond. We are writing therefore to ask you for clarification.

From a reading of the NATO website, we understand the following facts. Soon after the attack of 11 September 2001 on targets in the USA by unknown assailants, the USA, partnered by the UK, launched Operation Enduring Freedom, an attack on the territory of Afghanistan, with the aim of finding and destroying the command of al-Qaeda, a group suspected of the attack.

The United Nations Security Council subsequently authorized the despatch of an International Security Assistance Force to Afghanistan, with the role of assisting the Afghan government in establishing a secure and stable environment around the capital city, Kabul. Yet we understand, from the NATO website, that ISAF is not a UN force as such, but a 'coalition of the willing...which has a peace-enforcement mandate under Chapter VII of the UN Charter'.

Two years later, in 2003, the North Atlantic Treaty Organization was given command of ISAF. We learn from the website that its task involves mentoring, training and equipping the Afghan police and national armed forces. It also involves provision of humanitarian assistance in the aftermath of ISAF military operations,

counter-narcotics activity, and provincial reconstruction, for instance of schools and water supplies, and 'the encouragement of good governance'.

We note that the number of ISAF's troops has gradually expanded from an initial 5000 to 50,000 from 42 different countries. By far the majority of that 50,000 personnel are in fact US troops, with many also from the UK. ISAF's mandate has been extended from Kabul step by step to cover the north, west, south and eastern regions of Afghanistan. Nonetheless we understand that the USA continues to run a residual military project with the name Operation Enduring Freedom, which remains outside ISAF, again with support from the UK.

The questions asked by participants in our workshop, to which we would greatly appreciate your answers, are the following:

- Where is the legitimacy in NATO, a *partial, regional, military* structure, being engaged to fight a war on behalf of the United Nations, which is a *global international* institution intended to represent all the world's peoples?
- What is the justification for NATO fighting a war outside the geographical area covered by the Atlantic Treaty?
- Why is NATO fighting to overthrow and replace the government of a country that did not launch an attack on one of its members? (It is possible that the group known as Al-Qaeda did launch such an attack, and some of its personnel may have resided in Afghanistan, but surely that cannot be thought to legitimate retaliation against the government and citizens of the country in which they lived?)
- Are NATO military operations against farmers who grow, and business people who buy and sell, narcotics permissible in international law?
- How is it that more than eight years after the start of ISAF's operation, free and fair elections have not been enabled, an administration acceptable to a majority of Afghans has not been achieved, and daily life remains insecure for much of the population?
- What conditions will signify that the ISAF operation has been satisfactorily concluded, and when do you anticipate that they will be attained?

- Do Operation Enduring Freedom and ISAF have the same objectives and will they be achieved, and the two forces withdrawn, simultaneously?

We shall very much appreciate your replies to these questions, so that we can be in a better position to inform our members and those of the public that engage with Women in Black in the course of our weekly vigils.

Yours faithfully,

Cynthia Cockburn, for Women in Black, London branch.

Mr. Anders Fogh Rasmussen,
Secretary General,
Headquarters,
North Atlantic Treaty Organization,
Brussels,
Belgium.